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THE

MISCHIEVOUS DOCTRINE

OF

ENDLESS SUFFERING.

By M. W. STRANG.

(Second Edition.)

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The Mischievous Doctrine of Endless Suffering.

By M. W. Strang.

(An Address delivered in the Freemasons' Hall, Edinburgh.)

SOME years ago the late Poet Laureate published a remarkable poem, which attracted no little attention among thoughtful and religious persons. It was entitled "Despair,"* and bore this preface: "A man and his wife, having lost faith in a God and hope of a life to come, and being utterly miserable in this, resolve to end themselves by drowning. The woman is drowned, but the man is rescued by the minister of the sect he had abandoned." The poem which followed was the supposed utterance of this wretched man, who, instead of thanking his rescuer, poured out upon him the bitterness of his soul, resenting the mistaken kindness of his interference,

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* *Nineteenth Century* Magazine, November, 1881.

and reproaching him openly as the prime cause of that infidelity which had driven the speaker to such desperate deeds.

"See, we were nursed in the dark night-fold of your fatalist creed,

* * * * * *

And we broke away from the Christ, our human brother and friend,
For He spoke, or it seemed that He spoke, of a hell without help, without end.

* * * * * *

Nay, but I am not claiming your pity : I know you of old—
Small pity for those that have ranged from the narrow warmth of your fold,
Where you bawled the dark side of your faith and *a God of eternal rage*,
Till you flung us back on ourselves, and the human heart, and the Age."

It is the privilege of poets to give utterance to the thoughts which others feel but dare scarce express, and thus sometimes to become the articulate voice of a prevailing sentiment of their times, which waited for the singer's aid to give it vent. There can be no doubt that Tennyson, in protesting against the Calvinistic doctrine of a Divinely pre-ordained hell of *eternal anguish*, whether expressing his own sentiments or not, was at least uttering, on behalf of others, the troubled doubts, and more than doubts, of many thoughtful minds in our day. There is an ever-increasing tendency to turn with horror and indignation from the "dark fatalist creed" of former generations. Whether this revulsion pause at a healthy faith in things Divine, or rush to some equally evil extreme of unbelief or impiety, will depend very much on whether a wise and scriptural substitute is found for the doctrine rejected.

It is my belief, and that of many Christians, that the doctrine of LIFE IN CHRIST constitutes that happy mean of *truth*, which, lying midway between two extremes of error, forms the only safe resting-place for the troubled mind; neither exaggerating the severity of God until it tends to incredulity, nor on the other hand venturing, as do the advocates of Universalism, to empty the Divine threats of their legitimate meaning.

My present purpose is to dwell for a little upon the natural tendency of the traditional doctrine of eternal suffering to foster unbelief. I believe it can be proved that Tennyson's fictitious case is a type of many a true one, and that much of the infidelity of modern times is due to the teaching and preaching of such a doctrine in days unfortunately not yet finally past. The doctrine, embalmed in the traditions of the elders, on human destiny and Divine purpose is as follows:—

"Our first parents, being the root of all mankind, the guilt of their sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation" (*Westminster Confession* vi. 3).

"Every sin, *both original and actual*, . . . doth, in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with *all miseries* spiritual, temporal, and *eternal*" (*Ibid.* vi. 6).

"The wicked, who know not God, and obey not the Gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into *eternal torments*, and be punished with everlasting destruction" [mark the unperceived contradiction!] "from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power" (*Ibid.* xxxiii. 2).

"The punishments of sin in the world to come are

everlasting separation from the comfortable presence of God, and *most grievous torments in soul and body without intermission in hell fire for ever*" (*Larger Catechism* Ques. 29).

"The wicked shall be cast into hell, to be punished with *unspeakable torments both of body and soul*, with the devil and his angels for ever" (*Ibid.* Ques. 89).

The terrible nature of the dogma here in so cold-blooded a manner laid down, may, through long familiarity, not strike every reader; but let any one set himself seriously to try to realize the meaning of the words employed, and the appalling nature of the thing will not long evade him.

It is here declared that every single sin, committed by a poor, frail, tempted human being, is sufficient of itself to render him liable to the endurance of the most intense anguish, *both mental and bodily combined*, without one moment's interruption, as long as God Himself endures! Nay, worse, it is affirmed that it does not even require an "actual" personal transgression to incur this fearful fate, but that "original" sin also, or the *hereditary inclination to evil*, even if it has not had time to develop into actual wrong-doing, is of itself sufficient to doom to this endless suffering every descendant of Adam.

Now the *innate incredibility* of such teaching stands openly confessed by many of its professed adherents and of its most learned and devout advocates. True, baser minds will be found who profess to be able to justify the doctrine, and even to exult in the prospect which it holds out. But not so the men whose names are most worthy of respect among its champions.

Calvin, speaking of the fall of Adam as involving so many nations with their children in eternal death (by which he means *eternal life in misery*) says: "A horrible decree, I confess." All that he can say in its defence is that "such was the will of God," and he

thinks that those who are "so loquacious on every other point must here be struck dumb."

And listen to the sad lament of the gentle ALBERT BARNES :—"I do not know that I have a ray of light on this subject, which I had not when the subject first flashed across my soul. I have read, to some extent, what wise and good men have written. I have looked at their theories and their explanations. I have endeavoured to weigh their arguments, *for my whole soul pants for light and relief on these questions. But I get neither; and in the distress and anguish of my own spirit, I confess that I see no light whatever.* I see not one ray to disclose to me the reason why sin came into the world . . . and *why man must suffer to all eternity.*"

To these examples let me add one more, nearer our own doors. The late Dr. JOSEPH BROWN, of Glasgow, one of the most deservedly respected names in the United Presbyterian Church, in the discussions which took place a few years ago on the "Macrae Case," confessed that the longer he preached, the more "tremulous" did his spirit become on this question of future punishment, under a growing sense of the "burden" laid upon him; and he added that "*they would all feel it a relief* if they could, on an honest interpretation of the Bible, come to the conclusion *that sin and misery would ultimately perish* in God's universe."

If such be the effect of the doctrine on good, pious, Christlike minds, professing to believe in it, need we wonder if less reverent minds, and more impulsive spirits, finding such dogmas embodied in the Creeds as being of the very foundation of Christianity, should break into open and bitter rebellion, not against this particular doctrine alone, but against the whole idea of a Divine Being and a Divine Revelation, and should exclaim with the would-be suicide of Tennyson :—

"What? I should call on that Infinite Love that has served us so well?
Infinite Wickedness, rather, that made everlasting Hell,
Made us, fore-knew us, fore-doom'd us, and does what He will with His own."

Far be it from me to justify such language. But before we cry out "Blasphemy," let us ask, with the poet, "whose is the fault?" There can be no doubt that this doctrine of *eternal anguish* is largely responsible that such things are thought and spoken of the God of Love. And if the doctrine be untrue—a point which I shall come to anon—how fearful the responsibility!

What was it but this doctrine which gave the handle to that most daring of satires on professors of Christianity—Burns's "Holy Willie's Prayer?" What else was it that led Byron to describe the Almighty as an "omnipotent tyrant?" What was it but this representation of the Divine character which so burned into Shelley's soul as to prompt him to speak of the God of heaven, as one

> "Who, prototype of human misrule, sits
> High in heaven's realm, upon a golden throne,
> Even like an earthly king; and whose dread work,
> Hell, gapes for ever for the unhappy slaves
> Of fate, whom He created in his sport,
> To triumph in their torments when they fell?"

or led him to describe religion as a system of cruel oppression imposed on mankind by self-seeking hypocrites,

> "Who have three words . . . God, Hell, and Heaven!
> A vengeful, pitiless, and almighty fiend,
> Whose mercy is a nickname for the rage
> Of tameless tigers hungering for blood;
> Hell, a red gulf of everlasting fire,
> Where poisonous and undying worms prolong
> *Eternal misery* to those hapless slaves

> Whose life has been a penance for its crimes!
> And Heaven, a meed for those who dare belie
> Their human nature, quake, believe, and cringe,
> Before the mockeries of earthly power."
>
> —*Queen Mab.*

Again, while deploring such language, we charge it upon this traditional, and, as we hope presently to shew, erroneous doctrine of Divine retribution and human destiny that *it* has been a fruitful source of such unbelief in the Divine record and even the Divine existence; that *it* has caused the enemy to blaspheme; and presented the character of the "*Father of Mercies*" in a light which is lurid, repellant, and unlovable. Is it not an undeniable fact that this doctrine of eternal anguish is the main weapon on which infidelity, from the Shaftesbury of a former generation to the Ingersoll and Bradlaugh of ours, has hitherto relied in its attacks on Christianity, and that, if this be taken away, there is apt to be, if not a sudden silence among the gainsayers, at least a much less defiant tone of hatred and opposition?

But it is not the brutal and debased among mankind whom we are called to regard in this matter, but often the best men the world has seen, its most gifted thinkers, its most gentle and benevolent spirits, who have been driven into antagonism to all revealed religion by this cause.

The late J. STUART MILL, in his *Autobiography*, says: "The world would be astonished if it knew how great a proportion of its brightest ornaments—of those most distinguished even in popular estimation for wisdom and virtue—are complete sceptics in religion."

The causes of this scepticism, of which he confesses himself an example, are doubtless in many cases very similar to those which, with so much frankness, he gives as producing the effect in his own case. He

was taught his unbelief by his father, who, brought up as a Presbyterian, had been driven into utter unbelief by the traditional representations of the Divine character and conduct. He had rejected Christianity on moral grounds rather than intellectual. He says: "I have a hundred times heard him (his father) say that all ages and nations have represented their gods as wicked, in a constantly increasing progression; that mankind have gone on adding trait after trait till they reached the most perfect conception of wickedness which the human mind can devise, and have called this God, and prostrated themselves before it. This *ne plus ultra* of wickedness he considered to be embodied in what is commonly presented to mankind as the creed of Christianity. Think (he used to say) of a Being who would make a Hell—who would create the human race with the infallible foreknowledge, and therefore with the intention, that the great majority of them were to be consigned to *horrible* and *everlasting torment.*"

John Stuart Mill was a refined mind, a lover of popular freedom, a frank and fearless enemy of all forms of tyranny, and his words regarding this aspect of religion are not to be despised when he says: "The time, I believe, is drawing near when this dreadful conception of an object of worship will be no longer identified with Christianity, and when all persons with any sense of moral good and evil, will look upon it with the same indignation with which my father regarded it."

I have referred to Shelley. Here again, with all his errors (whose gravity I am not concerned to palliate), we have one of the gentlest of human beings. No one can even cursorily glance over his writings without seeing that his sensitive nature shrank from every form of cruelty, oppression, and tyranny, and no one has pleaded more ardently than he for the triumph of what he deemed justice and

mercy in the earth. He was no irreligious person naturally; even at the worst he was no Atheist. Why should this man have been lost to the cause of Christianity? Why was he driven into the ranks of its opponents? Because of this *fearful dogma of eternal misery*. The quotations from his poems need not necessarily be taken as expressing his own sentiments, seeing they are put into the mouths of his imaginary characters. But in his unfinished "Essay on Christianity," in which he speaks with great deference of the gentleness and goodness of Christ, he says:

"Jesus Christ would hardly have cited, as an example of all that is gentle and beneficent and compassionate, a Being who shall deliberately scheme to inflict on a large portion of the human race *tortures indescribably intense and indefinitely protracted;* who shall inflict them, too, without any mistake as to the true nature of pain—without any view to future good—merely because it is just. This and no other, is justice: to consider, under all the circumstances and consequences of a particular case, how the greatest quantity and purest quality of happiness will ensue from any action."

Again, in the same essay, speaking of the glorious future held out by Christ, he says:

"It is not to be believed that the most prominent group of this picture, which is framed so heart-moving and lovely . . . would consist of *millions of sensitive beings enduring, in every variety of torture which Omniscient vengeance could invent, immortal agony.*"

That which Mill and Shelley put from them as "not to be believed," is, notwithstanding, embodied in one shape or another in almost all the creeds of Christendom, its advocates all the while confessing, even after their best attempts to mitigate its horrible

aspect, that their "whole soul pants for relief" from the "burden" of such a faith.

So far I have merely shewn that the doctrine of eternal misery does not commend itself to human instincts of what is just, not to speak of what is good and merciful; but produces in sceptic and believer alike, a sense of painful moral and intellectual repulsion, varying only in degree.

Before touching briefly on the inquiry, "Is the doctrine true?" let me call to your minds the following most momentous testimony as to the generally mischievous effects of teaching such a dogma. The Rev. Rudolph Suffield, at one time a Roman Catholic priest, after quitting that church, gave the following as his experience of twenty years' acting as "Confessor to thousands," in "most of the large towns of England, in many portions of Ireland, in part of Scotland, and also in France." He says:

"Excepting instances I could count on my fingers, *the dogma of hell . . . did no moral or spiritual good, but rather the reverse.* It never affected the right persons; it frightened, nay, tortured, innocent young women and virtuous boys; it drove men and women into superstitious practices . . . It never, except in the rarest case, deterred from the commission of sin. It caused unceasing mental and moral difficulties, lowered the idea of God, and drove devout persons from the God of hell to Mary. When a Roman Catholic I on different occasions conferred on this subject with thoughtful friends among the clergy, who agreed with me in noticing and deploring the same sad results. . . . It always influenced the wrong people, and in a wrong way. It caused 'infidelity' to some, 'temptations' to others, and misery without virtue to most. The Roman Catholics are very sincere and 'real'; and *we found it difficult to avoid violating the conscience, when we told them to love and revere a God compromised to the creation of a hell of*

eternal wretchedness, a God perpetrating what would be scorned as horrible by the most cruel, revengeful, unjust tyrant on earth." *

It is time now to ask: IS THE DOCTRINE TRUE? Is the Gospel of the grace of God really weighted with such a load of seeming injustice as is in all these extracts painfully confessed? Does the Bible really ask us to believe such things of the Great Creator and Judge of all, and His dealings with the frail and erring sons of men? Or is it merely a nightmare of the creeds, a hideous creation of human imagination, with no more title perpetually to enslave the hearts of men than any other "baseless fabric" of a dream?

Let us glance first, generally, at the character of God as given in Scripture.

"A God of eternal rage!" So the creeds depict Him, shutting up in a doleful dungeon of despair millions of hapless creatures; for ever turning away His ear from the piteous cries that rise up to His throne from their unutterable pain all through the fathomless ages of eternity!

Now listen to the voice of Scripture:

"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide; *neither will He keep His anger for ever.*"—Ps. ciii. 8, 9.

"*His anger endureth but a moment;* in His favour is life."—Ps. xxx. 5.

Such is the frequent description of Him in the Bible. "The God of Love and the Creeds together, they cannot be thought."

Why, even the stern dispensation of the Law, "the letter which killeth," was ushered in by an announce-

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*Quoted in Preface to Ed. White's *Life in Christ*, Third Edition.

ment of the Divine character quite out of keeping with that which the creeds draw of Him who gave up His Son to death for a perishing race. God there appears as "*merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression and sin.*" True, He appears also as a "jealous God," that "will by no means clear the guilty." But mark the contrast, (unfortunately obscured in our usual translation); if He visits iniquity, it is only "unto *the third and fourth generations*," while He shows "mercy unto *the thousandth generation.*"† The duration of His mercy far exceeds that of His anger.

Such was the God of Israel, as described in His methods of dealing, by His own authority. Now turn for a moment to a page in the history of that people to whom this revelation of the Divine character was given. Growing corrupt by intimacy with the idolatrous nations around them, the Israelites adopted the forbidden worship of the heathen gods. Among other abominations which they adopted was the service of the Phoenician god, the most cruel idol of antiquity, to whom they offered their children as living sacrifices in the fire. Referring to this practice, God says through His prophet Jeremiah (xix. 4, 5), "They have built the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, *neither came it into My mind.*" "Neither came it into My mind." Yet the creeds of Christendom bid us believe that

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† See notes on Deut. v. 10, by W. Lindsay Alexander, D.D., in the *Pulpit Commentary*. Also notes on Exod. xx. 6, by Lange, Von Gerlach, Keil; and various authorities named in the *Speaker's Commentary*. Keil & Delitzsch say the cardinal number 1,000 is here used for the ordinal (1,000th), there being no form for the latter in Hebrew. See also margin of Revised Version.

thoughts of cruelty came into His mind and purpose from all eternity to which this is but as a "gnat" to a "camel"!

If such be the Old Testament view of the Divine character, in which mercy far predominates over wrath—what shall we say to the exhibition of the same thing in the New? Surely grace must more abundantly be found there. There God is more distinctly seen as the "Father of mercies," yearning over a lost world, seeking to bring them back to Himself, giving up that which was most precious to Himself for those who were His enemies, yet mercifully warning men at the same time that despisers of His grace would meet with sharp and condign punishment—such is the general aspect of the God of the New Testament.

Now, who that seriously ponders the Divine *goodness*, as depicted thus in both parts of the Bible, but must recoil, like John Foster, from the thought of His inflicting "eternal torment,"—"a doom of which it is infinitely beyond the highest archangel's faculty to apprehend a thousandth part of the horror."

The theory, then, besides being repugnant to *human* ideas of justice and goodness, is clearly out of harmony also with the broad outlines of the *Divine* character, as laid down in the Scriptures.

We shall perhaps be met with a protest that it is presumptuous on our part to judge of the Divine awards by our feeble intelligence. To which I reply:

1. Did not God expressly challenge human scrutiny of His judgments when He said, once and again, to Israel, "Ye say, 'the way of the Lord is not equal' (or just). Hear now, O house of Israel: Is not my way equal? Are not your ways unequal?" (Ezek. xix. 25-29; xxxiii. 17-20). If human opinion is thus challenged by God Himself on the reasonableness of

His revealed method of dealing with transgressors, who can deny us the right reverently to inquire into such things?

2. But, putting aside for the moment the question of the value of merely human instincts in the matter, we are surely bound to judge of the Divine dealings in the light of Scripture itself—unless we choose to be blind worshippers of an unknown and unknowable God. How otherwise than by an intelligent conviction, arrived at after careful inquiry, could we ever hope to take up the song of praise? "Salvation and glory and honour and power unto the Lord our God, for *true and righteous are His judgments*."

In fact, those who deprecate our inquiring into the justice of the matter, thereby only confess that they themselves know that on that head the traditional dogma will not stand investigation.

But let us come a little nearer to the evidence. Let us go to the fountain-head of information on the whole subject,—the record of man's first disobedience and the Divine penalty pronounced thereon.

Of Adam, placed in the garden of Eden, it is recorded:—"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. ii. 16, 17). Now, let us pause to ask whether Adam was at all likely to put on such language any of the ingenious interpretations of theologians. The threat was simple and plain, and our first parent could understand it to mean nothing else than that, if he transgressed, that newfound life in which he was rejoicing would be taken away, and he should return to earth from which he sprang.

The record goes on to tell, how, beguiled by the tempter, who came insinuating that God *did not mean*

what He said when He threatened death for transgression, Eve sinned, and Adam after her, and instantly the doom of *mortality* was pronounced,—"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground: for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. iii. 19).

Not a trace here of any but the same simple meaning of death—a dissolution of the living organism and a return to its original elements! Yet, no sooner have we read these words, than in steps Theology, and with a quibbling persistence strongly suggestive of the arguments of the wily serpent, bids us *read between the lines*, and believe that the Divine Judge had far other and more terrible intentions than those conveyed by the words of doom which He pronounced. Sometimes, under the guise of poetry, it appeals to human pride, and says:—

> "Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
> Was *not* spoken of *the soul.*"

Not spoken of the soul! Well, perhaps not, in *your* sense of that much-abused word. But spoken it certainly was of the "*living soul*" of these records, of the MAN *who had sinned*, and if that which sinned be not affected by the doom pronounced, but only the innocent house in which the real sinner dwelt, then let us admit at once that *no doom whatever* is here pronounced upon *the sinner.*

To Theology, therefore, with its fine-drawn definitions, and forced interpretations, we say: Stand aside, and let us listen to what God the Lord hath spoken. You affirm that God doomed mankind to an *everlasting life* in unspeakable agony because of this first transgression. Never was libel so foul, so false, as this. Not only is there not a whisper of any

such idea here, but see the mercy which interposed to *prevent* the very thing you say He intended to effect:—"And the Lord God said, behold, the man has become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, *lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live for ever:* therefore the Lord God *sent him forth from the garden of Eden*, to till the ground from whence he was taken" (Gen. iii. 22, 23). An immortal sinner, or an immortal race of sinners, is a conception of human folly; the wise and merciful Creator expressly put it beyond possibility of happening. For His own good and sufficient purposes He allowed the sinful race to enjoy a short and mortal life, tempered with many sorrows, yet on the whole filled with a far counterbalancing amount of good—but eternal existence in misery, "it came not into His mind."

How grievously has the Divine Mercy been slighted; how terribly has the Divine character been maligned.

He might have suppressed the race at the fountain-head. He might in the very day of transgression have taken the lives of our first parents. But His clemency—His clemency, not His malignity, spared them, hinted to them hope of recovery from the sad disaster which had befallen them, and predicted a long contest with evil in which the Tempter should ultimately be defeated and crushed. He promised this should be done by the Woman's seed. *Her seed!* Thus the culprits learned their lives were spared for a time, and that from *their own descendants* would spring the Deliverer. "And Adam called his wife's name Eve; [*i.e. living*] because she was the mother of all living." Strange name of *Hope* to be given in such circumstances! Can you conceive Adam thus cheerfully viewing the prospects of a numerous posterity if he had known that of those descendants millions and millions should be born only to inherit eternal woe?

If the conception of the creeds be foreign to this primal record of the Fall, equally so is it to later allusions to the subject.

"By one man," says Paul, "sin entered into the world, and *death* by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that (or in whom, *i.e.* Adam) all have sinned" (Rom. v. 12). "*Death* passed upon all men." How? What kind of death? Ask Theology, and again the process of mystification begins, and we are asked to put meanings upon the terms of which certainly Adam never dreamed. But ask Paul himself. He tells us in another place. Speaking of the *resurrection* he says: "Since by *man* came *death*, by man also came the *resurrection of the dead*." This can mean nothing but death in its usual sense; that death which is so sadly familiar to us all; that change and decay which we see in all around.

Sweep away the cobwebs of theological stagnation, and let the light of Heaven fall upon this question. Adam was condemned to die, and die he did, as we read in Gen. v. 5. But ere he died, he became the progenitor of a race, who, as no stream can rise above its source, inherited their father's mortality, and are subject to death.

God suffered things thus to be. He was not bound to spare Adam's life. He was not bound to give even a frail and transient life to his descendants. But He did so, and His doing so was *an act of mercy*. He purposed to give immortality—that immortality which Adam had forfeited—through another channel. And so, when the fulness of time had come, He sent His Son into the world, gave Him up to taste death for all men, and having raised Him from the dead, proclaims that whosoever believeth in Him shall have EVERLASTING LIFE. He was not bound to make such a provision. He was not bound to give life at all, still less to give immortality, to any sinner. "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." "For

if by one offence death reigned by one; much more they who receive (*i.e. accept*) the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one—Jesus Christ" (Rom. v. 17). "The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam, was made a quickening (*i.e. life-giving*) Spirit."

What, then, of those who attain not to this eternal life? The creeds would have us believe they will suffer endless agony. Atrocious thought, surely instilled into men's minds by the "father of lies," that he might confirm their rebellion against the "Father of mercies!" The Scripture says they shall *perish.* Would you know what that means? Then take again the words of that esteemed clergyman already quoted on page 5 :—

"They would all feel it a relief" (he said) "if they could, on an honest interpretation of the Bible, come to the conclusion that sin and misery would ultimately *perish* in God's universe."

By *perish* here he meant—what it naturally means—*come to an end, cease to be.* This, then, is the term which Scripture uses to convey the fate from which the Saviour came to redeem us, and to convey the fate that impends over the impenitent. Even of the most hardened offenders, those who "deny the Lord who bought them," it is said: "These, like natural brute beasts, meant to be captured and *destroyed*, shall *utterly perish* in their own corruption" (2 Peter ii. 12).*

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*In this remarkable passage (which is almost sufficient of itself to settle the whole controversy), the Greek word *phthora* —"corruption," or "destruction," occurs twice. Evil men and brute beasts are both said to be liable to *phthora.* Now, Plato, in his great argument on human immortality, uses the same word, and declares that what is "immortal" is not subject to *phthora;* or, *vice versâ*, what is subject to *phthora* CANNOT BE IMMORTAL.

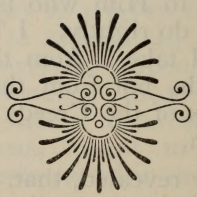
Not that this happens at the first death. For there "will be a resurrection of both just and *unjust.*" The latter, however, shall not see life [eternal], but shall be consigned to the second death, from which no resurrection is promised. The Divine judgment on sinners will be sudden, sharp, severe, accompanied with more or less pain in the infliction, but the end of it shall be that the wicked are consumed out of the earth, and are no more (Ps. xxxiv. 9, 10). How different from the idea of the schools, as to the penalty of *actual sin*—an idea so manifestly unjust that its advocates are now constrained to invent a new theory to justify it, and to tell us that eternal agony is inflicted *because of the eternal sins of Hell!!* A pure invention, this, of the human mind, depraved and darkened by its own horrible imaginings, and quite irreconcileable with Scripture, which threatens future punishment for *the sins of the present.*

God only knows how many of the human race will finally be deemed irreclaimable, incorrigible offenders. With such a point I meddle not. The destiny of the heathen, and those who have never heard the offer of His grace, I leave to Him who is Judge of all the earth, and who will do rightly. I have confidence in His character, for I take it from the Scriptures, and not from the Creeds, nor from the bitter calumnies which the doctrines of the Creeds have forced some men to utter of Him.

But *this* is clearly revealed, that, be the individuals who they may, be their number large or small, "they who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be punished with EVERLASTING DESTRUCTION from the presence of the Lord and of His holy angels" (2 Thess. i. 9, 10). This is the "everlasting punishment" of Scripture. Everlasting destruction! Not endless pain. "Our God is a *consuming fire*" to all that is evil; not a scorching, torturing fire, that burns but never destroys.

Search and see, and beware you despise not offered mercy. Wake up, and shake off this delusive nightmare of human error. Apart from Christ there is no permanence in God's universe for any sinner. "The world passeth away and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God *abideth for ever*." And this is His will, that we should believe on Him whom He hath sent into the world—not to condemn it, but that the world through Him might be saved.

"The wages of sin is *Death*, but the *free gift* of God is Eternal Life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. vi. 23).



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